

# PEAT PALS FOR LIFE

**Peat restoration in Flanders and the Netherlands**



# The Project

Peat Pals for LIFE is an European-funded project in which Natuurpunt, Natuurmonumenten, Wageningen University and Eurosite will improve and restore a variety of peat ecosystems in Flanders and the Netherlands. Peatlands are important as they are a home for numerous (endangered) species and also play a key role in climate change mitigation.

The overall objective is to conserve the particular habitat types active raised bog, transition mires and quaking bogs, Molinion caerulea meadows on peat soils and open water bodies with a species-rich vegetation in peat pits, together with their associated species in European protected nature reserves. To realize this, Natuurmonumenten will improve the hydrology of 260 ha of raised bog habitat in the Netherlands (Fochteloërveen), while Natuurpunt will restore the local hydrology in 56 ha of lowland peat ecosystems in Flanders (Abeekvallei, Dommeldal, Veewei). Restoration of the local water system and abiotics will lead to an improved quality and expansion of our peatlands, and will also reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of these carbon-rich areas.





Bogbean

## Valley of the Abeek

The Abeek valley is known as a hotspot for Flemish biodiversity. Alder brooks, Molinion caerulea meadows and marshes are some of the habitat types found there, where species such as opposite-leaved - and the alternate-leaved golden-saxifrage, marsh violet, marsh cinquefoil and bogbean thrive. In addition, the area is also known for the presence of a firm peat layer. However, nitrogen deposition, illegal excavations and draining for recreation and intensive agriculture are causing a loss of local biodiversity.

The Peat Pals for LIFE project aims to halt the current decline in the Abeek by restoring 14 ha of the quaking bog and transition mire habitat type. Removal of woody vegetation, rewetting by halting unnatural drainage, restoration of open water bodies for quaking bog development, removal of man-made structures and reintroduction of the peat-forming species marsh cinquefoil and bogbean are previsionsed restoration measures for the area.

golden-saxifrage









Devil's-bit

## Valley of the Dommel

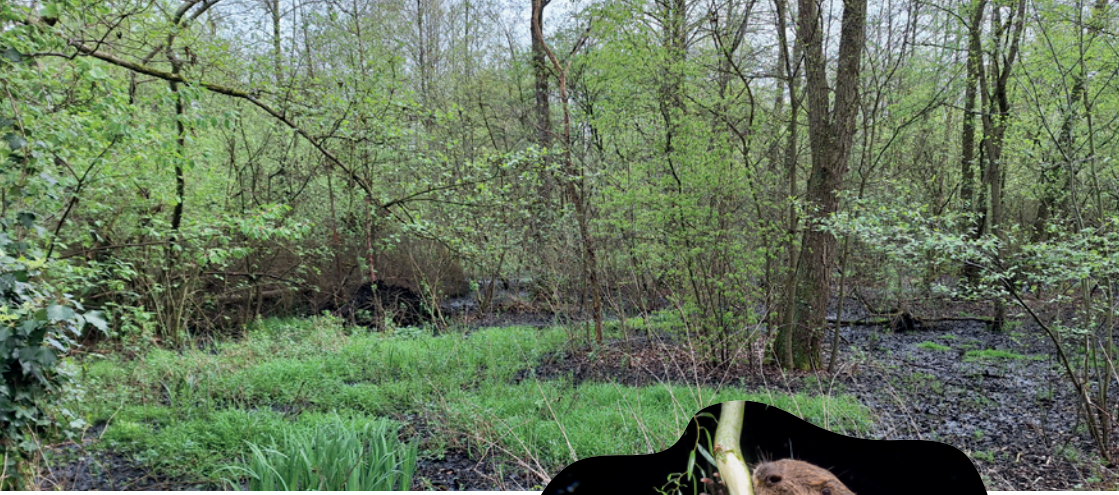
The Dommel valley is also known for being a speciose area in Flanders and houses species such as quaking grass, devil's-bit, Glanville fritillary and orchids. Brooks, reed beds, hay meadows and pastures alternate in the valley, but it is mainly known for the blue shine due to the presence of several *Molinion caerulea* meadows. Furthermore, a thick peat layer has been found in the soil of the valley, which explains the water infiltration capacities of the area. Here as well, threats such as nitrogen deposition, recreation and intensive agriculture result in a decline of the local biodiversity.

This LIFE project aims to halt the ongoing nature degradation in the valley of the Dommel by restoring 14 ha of *Molinion caerulea* meadows, 4 ha of transition mires and quaking bogs and 4 ha of open water bodies with a species-rich vegetation. The focus is

on reconnecting existing habitat fragments by removing woody vegetation, removing unnatural drainage and recreational ponds to restore the historical hydrology and removing man-made structures to recreate the historical relief of the area. The valley has a lot of potential for nature restoration at a system level, therefore the measures of this project are chosen in such a way to reconnect and reinforce the areas that were fragmented during last century.

Glanville fritillary





Beaver

## Veewei

Nature reserve the Veewei has a unique biodiversity resulting from its characteristic wet-dry gradient. The Grote Nete river and her tributary de Veeweiloop flow through this area. Species such as true Iceland lichen, reindeer lichen, raven, beaver, smooth snake, bogbean, slender sedge, marsh cinquefoil, blue bonnet and the grayling feel at home in the shifting sands, coniferous forests, heathlands, low-productive grasslands, flower-rich hay meadows and peatlands that give the area its characteristic look. The current level of nitrogen deposition, a disturbed hydrology and recreation in the form of many unlicensed weekend stays caused a steady decline in the natural values of the nature reserve.

To turn the tide in nature's favour, in this LIFE project Natuurpunt wants to restore the historical peat core of the Veewei and preserve it in a sustainable way. Measures such as removing woody vegetation, halting unnatural drainage, removing man-made elements and controlling invasive species such as the Himalayan balsam and floating pennywort will allow us to restore 16 ha of quaking bogs and transition mires and 4 ha of *Molinion caerulea* meadows in the area.

smooth snake





## Future perspectives

Peat Pals for LIFE aims to put peat in Flanders back on the map by restoring and sustaining the peat layer in the Abeek valley, the Dommel valley and the Veewei. The area of Flemish peatland has seen a decline of about 90% (only 6000 ha out of 56000 ha is left) following WWII due to numerous factors such as peat mining, resulting in biodiversity loss and enormous greenhouse gas emissions. International cooperation allows large-scale peatland restoration to preserve these important habitat types, boosting peat-associated biodiversity and retaining the nature benefits that peatlands provide us with.

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